

Iraqis for Saddam's trial in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqis are insisting on trying Saddam Hussein in his own country and with their own judges, as several countries prepare their complaints against the former dictator US forces captured on December 13.

"All the Governing Council members agree that Saddam must be tried in Iraq by Iraqi judges," Hamid al-Kifai, spokesman for the US-appointed transitional council, told AFP yesterday.

He said that council members were currently talking about the set-up of the court that will try the ousted president, adding that judges would be chosen as quickly as possible.

Kifai also said that Saddam "was still undergoing questioning by the Americans," who would subse-

quently hand him over to Iraqi authorities.

"The hearing will be public. We want it to reveal everything that happened," he said, emphasizing that "Saddam committed crimes against the Iraqi people. He killed three million Iraqis and forced two million more into exile."

But the ousted president's trial should not take place until after the new government assumes power in Iraq at the end of June 2004 in line with a US plan to hand over sovereignty, to avoid any foreign interference, Iraqi officials said.

Justice Minister Hashem al-Shebli rejected yesterday calls from abroad to try Saddam in an international court.

"We reject demands to try the former president in an international tribunal, and we emphasize that he must be tried in Iraq," the

minister said in a statement broadcast on coalition-controlled Iraqi television.

"Iran, Israel or others are free to say what they want, but this doesn't concern us," he said.

Iran headed a chorus of voices Monday demanding that Saddam Hussein be tried before an international court and even suggested the possibility of a trial in Iran. The government said that Iran was preparing a complaint before an international court against Saddam.

An international court "should determine who equipped this dictator to disrupt our region and impose three big crises," an Iranian government spokesman said, referring to Saddam's invasion of Iran, Kuwait and then this year's US invasion of Iraq itself.

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Plan to peg savings instrument interest to treasury bills'

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Interest rate on savings instruments may be pegged to six-monthly interest rates of five-year maturity treasury bills, according to a plan drawn up by the finance ministry.

A special savings scheme designed for retired government and private officials is also underway.

Under the proposed rate calculation, the savings instruments may lose 1-1.5 percentage points on interest. If the last six months' rate of treasury bills had been calculated, a person buying savings instruments today would have got above 11 percent against the current minimum of 12 percent.

These are all part of the government's move to peg the interest rate of savings instruments to the

market as directed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It would also help reduce banks' lending rates, as the financial institutions would then be able to offer lower deposit rates.

The government borrows by selling the savings instruments and uses the funds to foot the bills of development projects. But because of high interest rates, the government's loan repayment liability also remains high. Despite this, the government has been using this channel to borrow funds because such an operation has no inflationary pressure.

At the end of June this year, the outstanding amount of savings instruments stood at Tk 29,582 crore, up from Tk 25,276 crore a year ago. Sales of savings certificates increased 12 percent in the

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ADNAN SAMI AT PEPSI CONCERT



Popular singer of the subcontinent Adnan Sami renders a number at a concert, sponsored by Pepsi, at the Women's Sports Complex in Dhanmondi yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

DOWN TO EARTH

River raiders and polluters on the loose

ASM NURUNNABI

Three rivers, namely Buriganga flowing through the heart of the city, Turag and Dhaleswari flowing along city suburbs, have become victims of emerging ecological disaster. In the case of Buriganga, the damage has gone so far as the High Court found it urgently necessary to intervene in aid of the river.

The High Court previously directed the government and the authorities concerned to submit a timetable for the measures to be taken for recovery of public land along Buriganga river by evicting encroachers. The issue will inevitably involve the question of saving the river from the massive pollution that has already set in.

It is clear to any observer that the Buriganga is dying or rather is being killed. Industrial wastes are

discharged into the river while especially effluents from tanneries located in city's Hazaribagh area have been taking a heavy toll defiling the river which goes on unabated.

The Department of Environment has identified 249 factories along the Buriganga which are responsible for polluting the river on a menacing scale.

The level of dissolved oxygen in the river is reported to be far lower for healthy aquatic life. The chromium contamination of the river has also reportedly reached a danger level.

River grabbing is another tragedy that has befallen the Buriganga. The banks of the river have long been under illegal occupation.

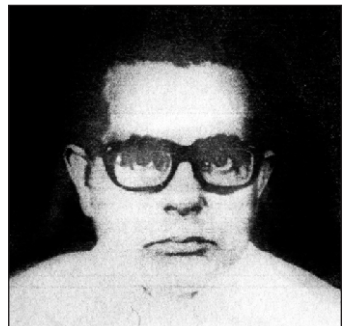
Now sections of the river itself are sites of illegal constructions raised upon bamboo posts -- an extension of riverbank slums and

unauthorised establishments. It is alleged that string pulling at high levels has so far held back the process of elimination of such encroachments. Now that the High Court has intervened in the matter, we may wait and see what remedial measures are taken by the authorities concerned.

The Department of Environment, the watchdog body, face the same difficulty to enforce laws for protecting the environment in the Dhaleswari river.

The department served final notice on more than a dozen industries in Savar directly releasing chemicals and dyes into the Dhaleswari river, but this too seems to have been ignored.

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Former MP Mohsin dead

UNB, Dhaka

Former lawmaker and freedom fighter Mohammad Mohsin died at Dhaka Central Hospital on Thursday night. He was 88.

Mohsin was treasurer of the then Pakistan Awami League and an accused in the Agartala Conspiracy Case. He was elected member of Pakistan National Assembly (MNA) in 1970 and member of parliament from Khulna in 1973.

He left behind his two sons, three daughters and a host of admirers.

An eminent social worker,

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FFs urged to unite against anti-liberation forces in power

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of Awami League (AL) and several pro-AL organisations yesterday called for bringing in unity among the country's freedom fighters in order to brave the anti-liberation force now in state power.

They were speaking at the opening session of a four-day programme titled Muktiyoddha Mancho (freedom fighters' platform) organised by Muktiyoddha Samannoi Parishad (MSP) on the occasion of the Victory Day at Muktagangan in the city.

Inaugurating the event, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said "freedom fighters need to join forces once again to achieve materialisation of the goals and true reflection of the spirit of liberation war in the life of the masses."

Freedom was not bestowed on Bangladesh; rather millions had to make supreme sacrifices to earn it, said Abdul Jalil. "The very spirit of

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500 rebels surrender to Bhutanese forces

AFP, Guwahati

As many as 500 Indian rebels have surrendered to Bhutanese forces during a massive crackdown on rebel camps in the small Himalayan kingdom, a senior Indian intelligence official said yesterday.

"Faced with Bhutanese troops in hot pursuit on one side and Indian soldiers lying in wait on the other side of the border, militants numbering up to 500 have surrendered before the Royal Bhutan Army," the official, who did not want to be identified, told AFP in Guwahati, the Assamese state capital.

On Thursday, the Indian army said up to 120 rebels and at least half a dozen Bhutanese soldiers had been killed since neighbouring Bhutan launched its first-ever military drive to evict three Indian separatist groups that had illegally set up bases in the country's south.

Bhutan has given no casualty

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French lawyer wants to defend Saddam

AFP, Amman

Controversial French lawyer Jacques Verges says he is willing to defend Saddam Hussein in court and, if he can, bring world leaders to the witness stand, in what could be a huge embarrassment for the United States, France and other countries.

Verges was speaking to AFP Thursday at the end of a visit to Amman to visit the family of former Iraqi deputy prime minister Tariq Aziz to prepare for his defence following his surrender to US troops after the fall of Baghdad.

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Prayer Timings		
December 20		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-40	4-00
Maghrib	5-23	5-28
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation